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Organizing for Rural Home-Talent Tournaments

University of Illinois
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(The pictures in the upper right-hand and lower
left-hand corners of the cover on this publication
by courtesy of C. L. Venard, Peoria.)

Organizing for Rural Home-Talent Tournaments

By D. E. LINDSTROM¹

ONE OF the chief purposes of rural home-talent tournaments is to discover, train, and develop local talent. Directed by self-controlled organizations under adequate guidance and stimulated by noncommercial motives, the development of interests, such as are provided by the activities that center around the production of home-talent tournaments, enriches rural life and often turns a drab, mechanical existence into creative, human, enjoyable living.

Each group entering a tournament seeks for its best talent, whether it be developed or in the rough, and then strives to provide the best possible materials and assistance for training. Pitting each group against one or more other groups stimulates every individual to his best effort—people will work hard for the honor of their group. In striving to win, however, other much more important values, such as the following, must not be overlooked.

Lessons in cooperation. The more complete the cooperation of each group competing, the keener will be the competition. The group that works in closest harmony secures the greatest benefits.

Welding of interests. Successful cooperation means packing all the interests of the group into a single purpose. In a tournament each member participating must work for the same goal. When one individual refuses to cooperate with the others, the whole group suffers.

Opportunity for group and individual training. Knowing how becomes increasingly important as progress is made, for progress does not come from experience alone. It must be supported by training, and training comes thru practice and study under direction. People who have coaching ability are thus a decided asset to any competing group.

TIME AND EFFORT REQUIRED

Tournaments cannot be successfully staged in a day, a week, or a month. Two months is usually the minimum time required. The real worth of tournaments often depends on thoroughness of preparation as carried out in regular and special meetings and conferences held while the tournaments are in progress. Unless proper organization is effected and means provided for complete representation of all interested

¹Associate in Rural Sociology. Much of the material in this circular will be recognized as similar to that in Circular 221, "Home Talent Tournaments," of the Extension Service of the College of Agriculture, University of Wisconsin. This is explained by the fact that the author of this circular was associated with the production of the Wisconsin circular while on the staff at that institution.

parties, misunderstanding and failure to secure whole-hearted cooperation may result.

Any group may enter a tournament. Entering may mean only carrying some phase of a regular group program into competition. A contest, held within the club, is open to all members. When in this way the best singers, the best instrumentalists, the best speakers or actors are found, the neighboring club or clubs may be challenged to a contest. From this point a county-wide, state-wide, or even nation-wide contest may develop.

MANY KINDS OF TOURNAMENTS

Well-known competitive group activities reveal many possibilities for talent development. They are so varied that a variety of individual interests and abilities may easily find expression thru them. Most of them require only a simple type of organization. Many other types of desirable community and intercommunity contests besides those listed here may be worked out. The effectiveness of any of them will depend on the soundness and practicability of their organization. All competing groups should be fully represented on the rule-making body and in the handling of contests. Such representation will insure local interest, democratic control, and the greatest degree of fairness and satisfaction to all concerned.

Drama tournaments provide opportunity for the competitive production of one-act plays. They have proved an excellent means of building up appreciation of good drama.

Music tournaments help to cultivate a liking for good music and stimulate a desire to take part in the better type of musical productions.

Corn-husking contests, as developed in Illinois,¹ have stimulated community endeavors and cooperative effort of a somewhat different nature from those stimulated by music and drama tournaments. La-Salle county has held five of these contests since 1926. Ten men enter the contests, one of whom is usually selected for further competition. Seventy or more people assist in staging a contest.

1. A committee of three selects the field of corn for competition and asks the cooperation of the man whose field is selected.
2. Ten teams and drivers are provided (one for each of ten contestants).
3. Twenty gleaners follow the contestants and gather the corn left by each.
4. Ten marshals on horseback keep the crowd back and in order.
5. A weighmaster and a checker sort out and weigh marketable corn.

Rules which have been used in these contests include the following:

Object. The object is to determine the contestant who can husk into the wagon the largest amount of ear corn, and who shall, at the same time,

¹Sponsored by the *Prairie Farmer*.

husk all the ears on the land covered, such corn when husked being reasonably free from husks.

Time. Husking shall continue one hour and twenty minutes.

Rows. All contestants shall husk two rows at a time.

Ears. All ears are to be husked except those leaning into other rows. Ears leaning from other rows into the rows being husked are to be husked.

Gleaners. Gleaners are to gather all ears missed or missing the wagon. Marketable ears are to be weighed. No gleanings are to be done on the turns.

Cleanness of husking. Five ounces of husks are allowed for 100 pounds of corn. A deduction of 1 percent shall be made for each ounce over 5 ounces and 3 percent for each ounce over 8 ounces. Percentage deductions are to be made on basis of total weight in wagon.

Determining the winner. The one who husks the largest number of pounds of ear corn in one hour and twenty minutes, after deductions are made for corn left unhusked and excessive amount of husks, shall be declared the winner.¹



FIG. 1.—LASALLE COUNTY CORN-HUSKING CONTEST

The men and wagons lined up and ready for the start of the 1929 contest are shown in the picture above.

Baseball tournaments have come to form a popular diversion among organized farmers. The farm-bureau baseball project is a regular part of the program for an increasing number of farm bureaus in the state. Beginning in May or June local teams play in county leagues, county teams play in district leagues, and district games are scheduled to determine a state champion.

Debates among farm people in Illinois have been restricted to local clubs and to county farm groups. Debates require more intensive preparation than most activities and must have organized support to be successful.

Play days have been popular with rural schools in Wisconsin. They take the form of miniature track meets. In the home community the best performer in each of several units is chosen. These include

¹From score sheet prepared by the *Prairie Farmer*, Chicago.

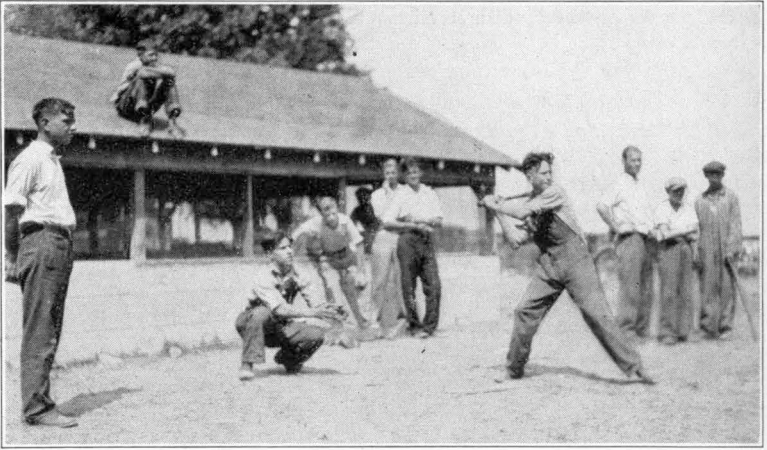


FIG. 2.—4-H CLUB BASEBALL TEAMS IN ACTION AT STATE FAIR

Such groups may be quickly organized at club camps and state gatherings and a tournament soon arranged.

tug of war; fifty-yard dashes for men, young men, boys, women, and girls; longer races; potato, wheelbarrow, sack, and similar races; broad and high jumps; baseball throw, and others. Each participant in each event is given 10 points for first place, 3 points for second place, 2 points for being on a winning team, and 1 point for being on a losing team.

Crop and livestock improvement contests are growing in favor,



FIG. 3.—“THE SURRENDER OF RED BIRD”

A scene from a pageant presented by 4-H club boys and girls at the 1928 club tour at the University of Wisconsin.

especially since so much emphasis is being given to quality production. An example of a crop contest is the acre-yield contest held by the Illinois Crop Improvement Association. Any farmer may compete by growing 10 acres of corn in one continuous plot. Awards are made on the basis of 40 percent for yield, 40 percent for economy of production, and 20 percent for quality. Entrants growing 100 bushels an acre become members of the "100 Bushel Corn Club." These contests are admirably fitted for sponsoring by local rural clubs or associations.

Yard and garden contests are being promoted by the Agricultural Extension Service of the University of Illinois and by the Yard and Garden Contest Association of America, in cooperation with the American Farm Bureau Federation. Yards are scored on the following:

Attractiveness.....	25 points
Livability.....	20 points
Utility.....	20 points
Condition and maintenance.....	15 points
Improvements for year.....	20 points

These contests are adapted to use by town and city groups as well as by rural groups. They have for their slogan, "You win if you lose."

HOW TO ORGANIZE FOR MUSIC AND DRAMA TOURNAMENTS

When people begin to ask how to hold a tournament it is time to make some effort to determine just how many groups are or would be interested. The interest may be local, or may be spread thru a district, or a county, or be scattered over the state. In any case a tournament needs to be well organized. Following are the steps in such an organization:

Hold a meeting of interested representatives. This preliminary meeting may be called by a farm or home adviser, county superintendent of schools, any local, district, or county leader, or by one or more of the groups cooperating. The desirability of holding a tournament is discussed and voted on. If favored, a temporary organization is set up, the procedure being as follows:

1. *Select a temporary chairman.* This person should not be a local or county paid official if this can be avoided, and should be one who lives as near as possible to the officer of the sponsoring organization, if there is such an officer.

2. *Appoint a secretary to keep a record of the proceedings.*

3. *Draft temporary rules.* Representatives from each of the groups present should have the local group conditions clearly in mind and be ready to take definite part in formulating the rules. Rules covering the following points should be considered at this meeting.

- a. *Eligibility.* Whether to include only farm groups, or rural village and

town groups; if town groups, what size of town and whether participants should be members of some particular club or should be residents in the community.

b. *Features.* Whether the features should be one or several. If there are to be one-act plays, then arrangements for quartettes, orchestras, or other features should be included.

c. *Number in group.* For one-act plays the rules usually specify that there shall be not less than four; for orchestras not less than five nor more than twelve, with both string and wind instruments represented; for choruses not more than twelve. Other numbers may be found desirable.

d. *Time limits.* Plays should be limited to not more than 50 minutes; music groups to not more than 10 minutes.

e. *Entries.* Some date should be set after which no more entries may be made. At least three weeks should be allowed, and adequate publicity should be given so that all groups may know and take action on the question whether or not to enter. Further action on rules and arrangements should be taken by calling a meeting, after a final entry date, of those who have entered.

Take up the question of entering the tournament in the local club or group. The chief reason given by local groups for hesitating to enter a tournament is that they do not think they can handle the work. They will never really know whether the majority of people wish to try it, however, until the matter has been fully discussed before the entire group.

When a group has voted to undertake a competitive musical or dramatic production, plans for carrying it out need to be carefully made. The following brief outline will suggest some essential steps. (Further suggestions on how to put on one-act plays will be found in Illinois Circular 373, "Dramatics for Farm Folks.")

1. *Select a competent director.* This person should be willing to take responsibility. He is to act for the group in all matters concerned with the tournament. The group or the club is the legislative body, deciding on a course of action; the director is the executive who tries to see that the plans decided on by the group are put into effect. It is incumbent upon the members of the group to respect the authority of the director and his ability to carry out their ideas. The director defers to the group, however, in all matters of important policy requiring their decision.

2. *Find a good coach.* Knowledge of music and drama are important qualifications of a coach, but it is also necessary that a coach have the confidence of the group with which he is to work. On the other hand, the participants must remember that they are as responsible, thru their attitude and their willingness to cooperate, as is the coach himself for the success of the project.

3. *Get suitable materials with which to work.* The committee on selection of production materials, when one is appointed by the coach and director, needs to be open-minded and observant. It is better to choose a type of production that appears to be a little too hard than something that will become tiresome after working with it for a time. The material selected should at least be adaptable, worth while, and have literary or artistic value. The committee should select a variety of material to submit to the group. The coach and director should advise the committee and the group in making final selection.

4. *Select interested workers.* To include a person who does not fit in a cast or plan is likely to be as destructive to group spirit as selecting the wrong

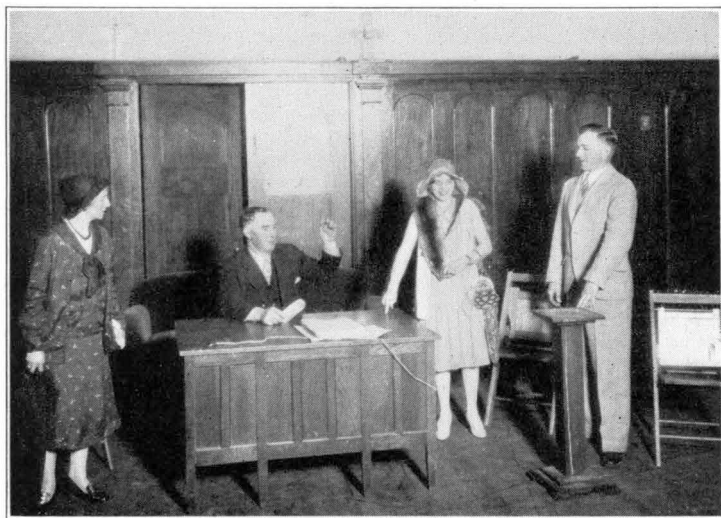


FIG. 4.—"THE MAYOR AND THE MANICURE"

A scene from a play by George Ade as presented by the Savoy farm-bureau unit, Champaign county, winners of the first Illinois state drama tournament, 1929-30.

kind of material. Selection of a cast or members of a team should be made by the coach with the advice of a committee. Everyone in the group or club should be encouraged to try out because no one really knows what he can do until he tries.

5. *Be as definite as possible about practice times.* The hours chosen should be those most convenient for the group.

6. *Make last practice public.* Sometimes this is termed a public dress rehearsal. Thus the group is tested before it enters its first contest.

Call a county directors' meeting to complete the organization. This meeting should follow as closely as possible upon the closing entry date. At this time the county officers are chosen for the entire period of the tournament. It is understood that the directors of the local groups that are entered are empowered by their groups to act for them. The county directors proceed as follows: They—

1. *Elect a permanent chairman and secretary.* The temporary chairman and secretary are usually selected to fill these offices.

2. *Form county committees.* The directors form the committee of the whole to decide on the policies of the tournament. An *executive committee*, made up of the chairman, secretary, and a third elected from the group, are charged with carrying out the policies and taking care of details.

3. *Establish permanent rules.* The rules set up by the first meeting are reviewed, approved or altered, and passed on by the representatives of the groups cooperating. Additional rules are concerned with the following points:

Districting. If there are more than four competing groups, it is best to have elimination contests and then a final contest. No more than four plays and four musical events should come together on any one evening. If but six groups enter, two evenings may be used, one set of judges serving both times.

Dates. The first contests may be held within three weeks of the closing entry date. If preliminary contests are held, each should be on a different evening in order to give as many people as possible an opportunity to see them. When possible, they should, in each case, be held at the central meeting place of one of the competing groups. The finals may be held within the same week or in the next.

Places on program. The directors of the competing groups should draw lots in order to determine the place of each group on the program; or they may empower a noninterested person to make the drawings for them.

Admission charges. Admission charges should be arranged. They should be small but enough to cover hall rental, royalties, printing, and similar expenses.

Expenses. Decision should be made as to how expenses are to be handled. Each group should be in readiness to take care of its own expenses; only expenses incidental to the contest itself should be taken out of gate receipts. Surpluses or deficits should be taken care of by prorating to the groups competing. Sometimes surpluses are pooled for future tournaments, but it is usually best to make each tournament self-supporting. A prorating system based upon ratios determined by distance traveled multiplied by the number in the group, including the coach, has been found satisfactory. Often 50 percent of the surplus is divided equally and 50 percent prorated.

Example of Prorating System

Net surplus for prorating.....\$197.98

Group	Distance traveled	Number in group	Ratio	Share
I.....	50 miles.....	5	250	\$52.10
II.....	25 miles.....	6	150	31.26
III.....	100 miles.....	4	400	83.36
IV.....	10 miles.....	15	150	31.26
Total.....			950	\$197.98

Judges. The number of judges should be decided. Three or five judges to each feature are usually better than one. These should be selected outside the membership of the competing groups, from another community or county, in order to avoid suspicion of personal favoritism. The judges should be approved by the directors of each competing group. If the directors empower the executive committee or some other committee to select the judges, they should be willing to accept those selections. Judges who are willing to serve without compensation other than expenses should have preference, since this willingness is an indication of their genuine interest.

Method of judging. The methods of judging adopted should be completely understood. Judging should be by score sheet and without conference. The score sheet used needs to be worked out in advance and made available to all contestants. The score sheet used for one-act play competition in the drama tournaments of Illinois is shown on page 11. In general it is well to judge such features as male quartettes, mixed quartettes, women's trios, choruses, orchestras, or bands separately, that is, have one or more judges for each and avoid competition between these features. A single score sheet, however, may be adapted to any musical contest.

JUDGE'S SCORE SHEET

ONE-ACT PLAYS

No. Name of judge.....

This sheet is for the assistance of the judges in making placings. Placings will rule except in case of a tie, when the decision will be based on percentage.

Points to be considered	Total possible score	Average or mean ¹	Plays, in order of appearance on program			
			1st	2d	3d	4th
I Unity or teamwork—cooperation of actors.....	20%	15%				
II Smoothness—movement, avoidance of unnecessary waits.....	15%	13%				
III Characterization—convincingness of individual portrayal.....	15%	12%				
IV Vocal expression—clearness, appropriateness, and sympathy with mood of character.....	15%	12%				
V Costume, make-up, and setting—appropriateness to character and play.....	10%	8%				
VI Choice of play—a good play of its type.....	10%	9%				
VII Effectiveness—appeal to audience.....	15%	13%				
Total score.....	100%	82%				

¹These are the averages of the scores of 27 plays produced by rural groups in Illinois. The judge may find them helpful in weighing the merits of the groups they are judging.

JUDGE'S SCORE SHEET

MUSIC CONTEST

No. Name of judge.....

Points to be considered	Total possible score	Order of appearance on program			
		1st	2d	3d	4th
I Tone quality.....	25%				
II Accuracy in reading and executing.....	25%				
III Musical interpretation.....	20%				
IV Intonation and harmony.....	20%				
V Stage presence.....	10%				
Total score.....	100%				

When three or more judges are used, it is advisable to prepare a tally sheet (page 12) to help in computing placings. Ties are then easily discerned and decided by adding up percentages.

4. *Discuss opportunities for holding institutes or schools of instruction.* At least three 2-hour sessions, one on selection of participants and casting, a second on production, a third on physical equipment necessities, should be provided. Universities, denominational and normal colleges, and high schools have people with musical and dramatic training who would welcome the opportunity for such service. The discussion meetings should be—

TALLY SHEET
FOR COMPUTING JUDGES' SCORES

Judge No.	Order of appearance on program							
	First		Second		Third		Fourth	
	%	Placing	%	Placing	%	Placing	%	Placing
1.....	70 ¹	3	80 ¹	1	50 ¹	4	75 ¹	2
2.....	96	2	97	1	60	4	80	3
3.....	88	1	84	2	60	4	77	3
4.....	82	2	93	1	69	4	74	3
5.....	85	2	90	1	70	4	75	3
Total.....	421	10	444	6	309	20	381	14
Ranking.....		II		I		IV		III

¹Fictitious figures have been inserted to show method. In this case the second production on the program won first both by placing and by percentage.

a. *Open gatherings.* Coaches, directors, players, and interested observers should be urged to attend. An all-day affair lasting into the evening would make this meeting one of the big events of the tournament.

b. *Schools of instruction.* Definite plans should be made for securing the services of persons trained in music or drama. The meetings should be conducted in an informal manner, allowing for questions and discussion. As many people as possible should be urged to take part.

Plan responsibility for contests carefully. Emphasis needs to be given to the value of participation rather than to the desirability of winning. The tournament is most valuable to the local group. After the places and dates of the contests have been decided, the local committees acting as hosts should be prepared to take care of local hall, property, and stage arrangements, securing from the directors of visiting groups details as to property and similar needs.

A rehearsal in the hall where the contests are to be held should be planned in order that competing groups may acquaint themselves with the hall and stage. At this time duplications in property and scenic requirements can be discovered and avoided.

The contests are usually presided over by the director of the local group which is acting as host. If the chairman of the county executive committee is present, he may be asked to preside. Judges' score sheets are tallied in the presence of directors from competing groups to avoid suspicion.

Choose best means of advertising. Newspapers are usually glad to cooperate. Often a member of the executive committee is designated to make the news contact. Then all the local directors should



FIG. 5.—DANVERS TOWNSHIP ORCHESTRA

This group was the winner in McLean county and in the Illinois state rural orchestra contests in January, 1931.

keep him informed as to local developments. Word of mouth, telephone, radio, and news story are the best means of publicity.

STATE ORGANIZATION SIMILARLY PLANNED

If the interest is widespread, it may be desirable to hold a state tournament. The holding of a state tournament requires state organization on about the same plan as the county organization.

In a state tournament *county directors become a committee of the whole*. They represent their county winners in the legislative body of the state tournament. A smaller group is necessary, however, in order to carry out details of arrangements. *A state executive committee* is therefore selected, the members of which may be representatives of districts in the state.

Each member of the executive state committee represents a committee from each of the districts. This district committee in each case is made up of the county chairmen who represent the winners from the various counties in the district. These district committees confer, as necessary, concerning arrangements for district contests. It is well to locate the conference point at the place where the district contest is to be held.

FUNCTIONS OF OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS

Much of the success of the tournament depends on the way in which officers and directors discharge their responsibilities. The local

groups are the legislators and workers. The officers and directors are their executives and assistants. They ought to be well informed concerning the plans, needs, and desires of the participants in the tournament, in order to avoid friction and insure cooperation.



FIG. 6.—ADEQUATE ORGANIZATION PLANS¹

The importance of local groups as a foundation is reflected in the success of the state tournament in all its stages.

Directors. Whether serving the local, county, district, or state organization, directors are expected to assume the following responsibilities:

1. Act as chairmen at meetings, performances, and contests when necessary.
2. Represent the group in all meetings and conferences necessary.
3. Cooperate with the local coach.
4. Assist in the selection of committees.
5. Supervise publicity.
6. Make necessary arrangements for judges.
7. Aid finance committee in computing and apportioning all receipts according to agreements or rules made in directors' meetings.

Coaches. The coaches are responsible for seeing that the production is put into shape. They assume the following duties:

1. Take charge of all practices.
2. Select such assistants as are necessary.
3. Take charge of group in all performances.
4. Cooperate with the director.

¹This drawing is reproduced from Circular 221, "Home Talent Tournaments," of the Extension Service of the College of Agriculture, University of Wisconsin.

Contest chairmen. Contest chairmen are in general the persons in charge at the time the contests are being held. They assume the following duties:

1. Conduct contests so that each group competing has an equal chance, see that the ushers keep the doors closed during performances, and give such introductory explanations as may be necessary.
2. See that the ushers take up judges' ballots and that directors of competing groups are present when ballots are tallied.
3. Announce winners.
4. Attempt to maintain a spirit of fairness and sportsmanship.

BY-PRODUCTS OF TOURNAMENTS

Unless the groups competing, whether they win or lose, make further use of the training and experience they get from putting on a tournament, a large share of the benefits will be lost. Trading between groups, and appearances in border-county communities have been popular activities of groups taking part in home-talent tournaments.

Preparing for future activity along the lines emphasized by the tournaments, whether future tournaments are held or not, has made possible an enriched cultural group-life for those having once tried out in some such activity. The greatest good comes thru creative participation based on the joy of doing.